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SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS FEELING OUT THEIR ROLE

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: On April 22, the EU exploratory mission on election observation, and a representative of OSCE/ODIHR, briefed donor nation representatives in Kabul on their initial observations. Some team members updated a smaller group of donor nation representatives on April 25, providing a clearer picture of anticipated activities. In country April 15-26, team members traveled to Kandahar, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat to gain a broad security and logistical perspective. The team is confident that its organizations will sponsor observer missions, although final details remain undetermined. Concerns regarding logistical difficulties, mission independence, and other possible observation bodies dominated the meetings. END SUMMARY.

#### SHAPE OF THE EU MISSION

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¶2. (SBU) In the April 22 meeting, the EU mission stressed the goals of safety for observers, value for the cost, and improved methodology, highlighting that the fluid situation in Afghanistan would require flexibility in planning. They suggested that the observer mission would meet and exceed the 2005 benchmark for the rigor of observation and estimated a team of between 50-70 participants. Security issues will shape the deployment, which is unlikely to cover all provinces, even if it were expanded to include seconded EU member diplomats already in country.

¶3. (SBU) On April 25, after traveling outside Kabul, the EU team signaled it was looking to focus on staffing and deploying for a long-term observation mission (rather than a mission that would surge closer to the election date). These long-term observers would meet with local authorities, officials and civil society in the build-up to the elections. The survey mission expected to propose a core team to be based in Kabul, with additional hub groups in 8-9 cities. In the north and west, they see observers deploying as for a conventional EU election observation mission, with UN standard group houses and private bodyguards for security. Based on its visit to Kandahar, the delegation believed long-term observation in the southern provinces would be possible from security and logistics perspectives. They discussed a small presence through embedded observers in the member nation PRTs at Helmand and Uruzgan. These teams would not do voting day observation due to poor security. An observer might embed in Kandahar under the EU's existing agreement with Canada.

#### HOW TO COVER RC-EAST

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¶4. (SBU) The team had not determined whether or how to cover the east, where the PRTs are run by the United States. The team showed openness to embedding observers in U.S. PRTs if an agreement could be reached. They were firm that, due to EU practice, the EU mission could not accept seconded personnel U.S. personnel as any mission member had to be a national of an EU member state, Norway, Switzerland or Canada. Post and RC-East are arranging a survey trip for the EU security and logistics representative, who is staying a

few days longer.

#### DECLINING ISAF SECURITY

15. (SBU) The likely composition of a typical EU observer mission would include a political head of mission, a deputy, and experts to review between 5-10 thematic elements (e.g. minority participation, coalition building), plus support staff. With the budget currently unknown, the delegation estimated the mission could cost 2-5 times that of a normal observer mission. The survey team traveled by ISAF military convoy in Mazar and rejected that style of operation as inconsistent with an observer mission. They were clear that the EU mission would not seek ISAF or ANSF support for close protection or ground transport. The mission intends to employ private security companies for travel in armored vehicles and bodyguards. The team welcomed the availability of ISAF "in extremis" support and planned to explore emergency access to NATO medical facilities.

#### OTHER OBSERVATION MISSIONS

16. (U) The OSCE representative suggested her organization would send a 10-12 member working level support team for approximately five weeks. She stressed the differences between the OSCE mandate and that of the EU team, which would focus on different thematic areas. The OSCE support team, would actively recommend procedural improvements during the election process, while the EU team would emphasize the observer mandate, noting their goals as watching, noting and

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reporting. On April 22, a Japanese Embassy representative announced that Japan was considering sending a 5-6 person bilateral observer team to Bamyan, drawing some members from the embassy.

#### NEXT STEPS

17. (U) On April 26, most of the EU team returned to Brussels, except for the logistical and security representative. The team will draft its initial report and recommend a composition and operational plan for the mission. On the basis of the report, the EU Commissioner for external relations could approve the plan as early as mid-May. Once determined, the EU would announce the details of the team and its deployment through an official letter to the Independent Electoral Commission. A logistics team would travel to Kabul to advance the mission, followed by long-term observers arriving by early July.

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